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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet, targeted to girls, discusses issues surrounding puberty. The introduction describes the reaction of parents' to their children's process of growing up, as well as the reaction of other boys and girls to the physical changes of puberty. Physical changes that happen during puberty for girls and boys are listed. Books for girls on puberty are listed. Methods of obtaining these books are described, including purchasing them from a bookstore, taking them out of a library, and ordering them from a publisher. Suggestions are provided for how girls can talk to their parents about puberty. Suggestions range from thinking about picking a good time and place to talk to writing as an alternative to talking to parents. Specific information about menstruation is provided. Topics covered include: timing and duration of menstruation; girls' and boys' reactions to menstruation; and how menstruation affects girls. (ABL)

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FOR GIRLS GROWING UP.

BY MARGARET L. STUBBS with illustrations by Jennifer E. Putnam.

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Publication of the BODY TALK pamphlets was made possible by a grant to the author from an anonymous donor whose interests include not only girls' development, but the dissemination of research results to a wide audience. In addition, the author wishes to make special mention of her association with Drs. Jill Rierdan and Elissa Koff, co-principal investigators of a long-term study of early adolescent girls' development at the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. Much of the information about menstruation imparted in the pamphlets derives from this ongoing research, and the "we" mentioned in the text refers to members of the research group. Special mention as well should be made of Jennifer Putnam, who provided the illustrations, and of her mother, Jan Putnam, Assistant Director of the Center for Research on Women, who was responsible for the design and layout of the pamphlets. Thanks to Susan Bailey, Director of the Center for Research on Women, for her enthusiastic support of this project, and to those colleagues, Susan among them, who offered thoughtful comments on early drafts. And finally, thanks to the many girls and boys, men and women, who served as research participants.

Illustrations by Jennifer E. Putnam
Design and Production by Jan Putnam

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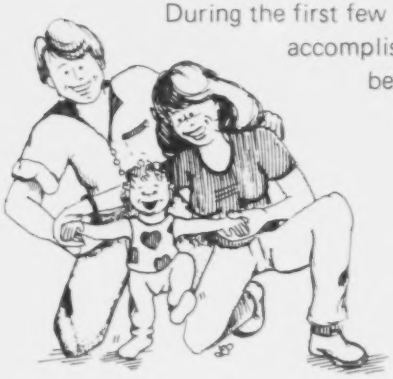
Some periods of growth are more dramatic than others.



During the first few years of your life, every accomplishment—your first smile, being able to roll over, sit up, crawl, take your first step, say your first word—was a celebrated sign of your growing independence as a person.

Puberty, which occurs roughly between the ages of 10 and 14, is another period of dramatic change. During this time, your body matures physically. You begin to look less like a child and more like an adult.

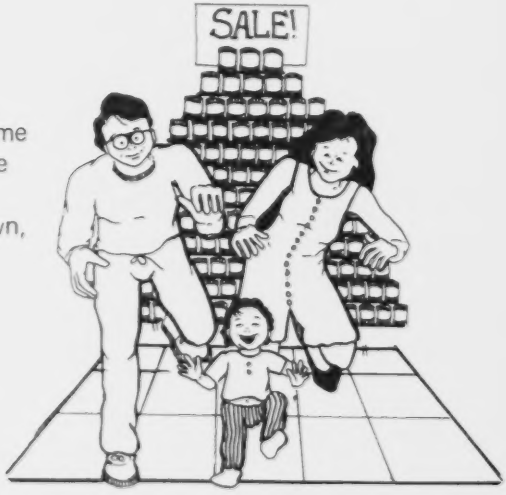
Adults are not always comfortable relating to or helping people your age who are becoming physically more mature. In fact, many adults find it harder to help their children during puberty than when they were much younger.

For some reason, when kids start to look like adults, and begin to act more grown up, some people get a little nervous.

Maybe it's because the balance of everything has to change.

It's a little like what happened with some of the earlier changes. When a toddler learns to walk, parents no longer have to carry the child or take along a stroller.

But they must become more aware of where the toddler is able to wander on her own, —and sometimes very quickly!



Each new change or accomplishment calls for a slightly different arrangement. And it takes time for everyone to adjust.

Some kids your age are very concerned about what's going to happen to them when their bodies start to change. And **lots** of kids who have noticed their bodies changing have questions about what is happening to them.

Some kids feel very comfortable talking to their parents about their concerns. And some—but not all—parents are very comfortable talking with their kids about almost anything.

Other kids can't imagine such a conversation with their parents—or anyone, even their friends. Everyone grows at different rates, and friends may feel out of touch with each other if they are not experiencing the same kinds of changes at the same time.

Getting along with boys your own age can be complicated during puberty, too. Kids your age know that some of the physical changes during puberty happen only to girls, while others happen only to boys. But, in general, girls don't know much about what happens to boys, and boys don't know much about what happens to girls, either!

What can happen as a result is that girls feel uncomfortable around boys and boys feel uncomfortable around girls. There can be a lot of teasing back and forth, and a lot of embarrassment on both sides.

You may not be experiencing any pubertal changes right now. You may be wondering when it's all going to start for you. Or you may be noticing changes in some of your friends. Or perhaps you have started to change a bit yourself, and have questions about, or reactions to, those changes.

This booklet is intended to be helpful to you--whether or not you've begun to change.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING PUBERTY?

A number of physical changes occur during puberty. Here's a list of some of them, in the order in which they often—***but not always***—occur:

For Girls	For Boys
Breasts start to enlarge	Testes and penis begin to grow
Straight pubic hair begins to appear	Straight pubic hair begins to appear
A growth spurt occurs	Voice changes begin
Pubic hair becomes kinky	Ejaculation becomes possible
Menstruation begins	Pubic hair becomes kinky
Underarm hair appears	A growth spurt occurs
	Underarm hair appears
	More noticeable voice changes occur

You may not know all of the terms mentioned in this list. Or you might want more information about any one of the changes listed.

The big question is — **how can you get the information to answer your questions?**

HOW TO GET INFORMATION

Of course, one way to get information is by reading. The following books are easy to read and have lots of information in them about all of these and other topics.

Ruth Bell, **Changing Bodies, Changing Lives**, Random House, New York.

Helen McKinnon Doan and Janice Morse, **Every Girl**, Stoddart Publishing Company Limited, 34 Lesmill Road, Toronto, Canada, M3B 2T6.

JoAnn Gardner-Loulan, Bonnie Lopez, and Marcia Quackenbush, **Period**, Volcano Press, P. O. Box 270, Volcano, CA 95689. (This book is also written in Spanish.)

Lynda Madaras's Growing Up Guide for Girls, Newmarket Press, New York.

Lynda Madaras, **What's Happening to My Body? A Guide for Mothers and Daughters**, Newmarket Press, New York.

Lynda Madaras, **The What's Happening to My Body Book for Boys: For Parents and Sons**, Newmarket Press, New York.

Peter Mayle, **What's Happening to Me?**, Lyle Stuart, Inc., 120 Enterprise Avenue, Secaucus, NJ 07094.

Peter Mayle, **Where Did I Come From?**, Lyle Stuart, Inc., 120 Enterprise Avenue, Secaucus, NJ 07094.

Kathy McCoy, **The Teenage Survival Book**, Wallaby Books, Simon & Schuster, New York.

To get these books, you could:

- Check them out of the library.
- Buy them yourself at a bookstore.
- Order them directly by writing to the publisher.
- Ask your parents to get them for you.

If you're like a lot of kids, you might be thinking . . .

I could never ask my parents to buy these books; they don't even know I'm thinking about this stuff.

I wouldn't be able to find them in the library, and I'd be too embarrassed to ask for help.

I don't have enough money to buy them. How do you order a book from a publisher anyway?

What would I do with them after I got them? Where could I keep them? I wouldn't be able to read them because I wouldn't want anyone to know I had them—especially my (mother/father/sister/brother).

TIPS FOR THE TONGUE-TIED

Let's start with the easy ones first. Remember that shopkeepers and librarians are **supposed** to be helpful to people who need their assistance. Being helpful is a part of their job. These people have had experience helping people of all ages find information about all kinds of embarrassing issues, and generally do not pry, and are very matter-of-fact in doing their work. Keep in mind that shopkeepers in particular are motivated to please their customers in return for their business.

It's true, some shopkeepers or librarians may be unfriendly, or they may give you the impression that they disapprove of what you are doing. But if you meet an unpleasant salesperson, try another bookstore. If the librarian at the public library makes you uncomfortable, try the library at school, or vice versa.

Go with a friend. You can give each other moral support!

Although it's a bit complicated, if you are interested in ordering a book directly from the publishers and you have the money–or can chip in with a friend to buy a book together–here is how to go about it:

First you need to write a letter to the publishers asking them to send you an order form for the book you want. For instance, a letter like this would be fine:

(Date)

Dear Publishers,

Could you please send me information about how to purchase (write in the name of the book you want)? My address is (write in your address). Thank you.

Sincerely,

(Your Name)

When the publishers write back to you, they will tell you how much money you need to send them along with the order. Because it's risky to send money through the mail, you will probably want to take the correct amount of money to a bank or a post office and ask the clerk to give you a money order for that amount which you can then enclose with your order. There is a small fee for getting a money order, so take along a bit of extra money. Two dollars would be more than enough. Be sure that you also include a note with your order, again giving the name of the book you want, and your address.

If all of this seems like too much trouble, buying the book yourself at a bookstore, or using the library are probably the best ways for you to get these books.

Unless, of course, you ask your parents to help you get them. . .

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR PARENTS

If you're someone who thinks that talking with your parents is out of the question, these suggestions might be helpful.

1. **Think about what you want to talk about.**

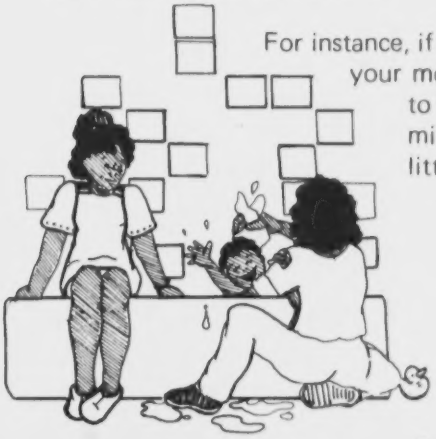
   Do you want to let your parents know that you are thinking about all of this, but not get into a really big discussion?

   Do you want information about some specific topic?
   Which one?
   Are there others?

2. **Given what you are interested in talking about, who do you think you'd be most comfortable talking to?**

   Either Mom or Dad Mom Dad

3. **After you've decided what you want to talk about and who you want to talk to, think about picking a good TIME and PLACE for this talk.**



For instance, if you want to talk to your mom, don't try to talk to her when she's in the middle of giving your little brother or sister a bath, or when she's busy.

If you're not sure it's a good time for her to talk, ask. You could say:

Mom, I want to talk to you about something. Is this a good time?

If you are feeling a little embarrassed, and privacy is important to you, say so. You might say:

Mom, I feel kind of embarrassed, but I want to talk to you—in private. I don't want you to tell anyone, even Dad, everything we say. Is this a good time?

If it's not a good time to talk, your mom can suggest a better time.

4. Eventually she'll say something like, "Yes, dear, what is it?" And then what do you say?

The answer to this question depends a lot on what it is that you really want to talk about. For instance, suppose you are interested in knowing more about menstruation. Here are some things you might want to know about or have help with:

You might want specific information about what it is, why it happens, when it happens, what it feels like, what supplies you need to take care of it. You could say:

I want to know about getting your period, about why it happens and what it feels like. Can you tell me about it, or get me some books to read?

You might want to ask your mom about her own experience. You could say:

I was wondering when you got your first period and what it was like.

If you haven't had a period, you might want your mom to get you some supplies to practice with before it happens, and so you'll have some on hand when you need them. You could say:

I've been thinking about when I'll get my period. I was wondering if you could get me some pads so I can get used to them, and so I'll have them when I need them.

You might be curious about how your mom takes care of her periods. You could say:

I'm wondering about how you take care of your periods. What supplies do you use? Where do you keep them?

You might be interested in any advice she has for you. You might say:

I think I know what to do, but do you have any advice for me?

5. Sometimes, props are helpful in starting a conversation.

Almost anything can be used as a prop. For instance, to get the conversation going, you can mention something that happened. You might say:

My friend _____ started having her period. It got me wondering about it.

Today at school all the kids were talking about . . .

In health class today (if your school has health classes), ***we talked about . . .***

You can show your mom a book that you've taken out of the library. You might say:

There's a book I'd like you to see.

Or you might say:

There's this book at school and I'd kind of like to bring it home and talk about it, but it's about personal stuff, and I can't think of where to keep it so that it'll be private. Got any ideas?

6. You might want to talk to your dad about some parts of growing up.

You might be interested in what he and his friends thought about menstruation when they were your age. Some older girls we've talked to said they liked talking to their dads because they found out what their dads' dates used to do, and how it wasn't a big deal if someone got a stain on a skirt. Your dad would probably also be a good source of information if you have questions about what changes boys your age are going through.

7. Think about if actually TALKING to your parents is the best way to communicate with them.

Some kids and parents find that it's easier to **write** back and forth to each other than it is to talk face to face.

Maybe writing would be easier in your family, too.

8. Keep in mind that you are probably not the only one who is uncomfortable about talking about these things.

Your parents may be a little uncomfortable about talking about these things as well. Maybe it was hard for them to talk to their parents about growing up when they were young. Even though **you** are ready to have a talk with one or both of them, **they** may not feel ready to have such a talk with you. They may need a little time to think about what they'd like to say, or how they'd like to say it.

9. Finally, if after trying some of these suggestions you are convinced that you can't talk with your parents, but still have questions and need information:

Try to think of someone else to talk to—like an older sister or brother, or an adult friend (maybe one of your parents' friends, your doctor, or a teacher) and **try again!**

AND NOW FOR SOME SPECIFIC INFORMATION . . .

Menstruation, or getting your period, is a very important part of puberty for girls. While we can't go into a lot of detail in this short pamphlet, we've talked to lots of girls between the ages of 11 and 14 about their ***thoughts about*** and ***reactions to*** menstruation—and we would like to share with you a bit of what we learned from them.

Just What is Menstruation Anyway?

Most girls have some idea of what menstruation is. Here is a very simple description. Menstruation is a kind of bleeding that can last for a period of several days. It's not like bleeding from a cut or a wound (it doesn't gush out) and only a small amount of bleeding (about one tablespoon per day) is involved. The blood comes out from between the legs through a special opening from the inside of the body. Once the bleeding stops, it usually doesn't start again until about three weeks later. In general, but not always, there are about 28 days between the first day of one period and the first day of the next period. During her period, a girl wears a pad or tampon to absorb the blood so that it doesn't leak out onto her clothes. (For more information, you might want to look at one of the books we mentioned before — see page 6.)

When Does Menstruation Begin?

Many girls who haven't started to menstruate, ***but have started to think about it***, wonder when they will start and if there's any way to predict ***exactly*** when their first period will be.

While there isn't any way to know exactly, it is true that often, but not always, a girl will get her first period around the age at which her mother got her first period. Some girls get their periods as early as eight years old, some as old as sixteen or seventeen. The average age in this country when girls get their period is around twelve and a half years old.

Researchers don't know for sure what all of the biological changes are that have to occur before a girl is ready to menstruate for the first time, but they think that one thing that may be important is that girls need to have a certain amount of body fat before menstruation will occur. The amount of fat that's needed isn't very much overall (we're not talking about a big weight gain!). We're talking about the amount of fat a girl has in relation to the amount of muscle—something most kids don't think about very much. When the amount of fat in the body is just right in comparison to the amount of muscle, a girl will begin to have periods. Without the necessary amount of fat, menstruation may not happen.

It is also generally true that menstruation happens after other pubertal changes—such as a growth spurt or the beginning of breast development—have already occurred. So, if girls have experienced most of those other changes—but not menstruation—a first period should not be too far off.

The important thing to remember is that everyone's pattern of growth is unique, and that information based on averages is only a clue about what might happen to any one person.

What Do Others My Age Think About Menstruation?

In general, most girls have mixed reactions to menstruation. For instance, most girls think that menstruation is normal, and that it is a sign of growing up. At the same time, some girls mention that menstruation is embarrassing. Some are concerned about whether other people know they are having a period...or what to do if their period starts, for instance,

on the way home on the bus or in the middle of math class... or if the blood accidentally leaks onto their clothes.

Boys your age wonder about menstruation, too. But, more often than not, no one explains it to them very well. Maybe adults think that because it doesn't happen to them, they don't need to know very much about it. Older college-aged boys we've talked to about menstruation say that when they first heard about menstruation, they were grossed out by the idea of it and too embarrassed to ask questions about it. Some of them remembered feeling sorry for girls because they thought girls might be scared by the blood and others mentioned that they felt worried for girls because they thought girls felt sick and were in pain during their periods. Some told us that they never really learned much about menstruation until much later, when they had a steady girlfriend whom they trusted, and who told them what it was like.

Because they don't know much about menstruation—and are too embarrassed when they first hear about it to ask many questions—some boys may tease girls about it. And others think that having a period is much worse than girls think it is. Hopefully, their opinions about menstruation and their reactions to it will improve if they learn more about it.

What Will My Experience Be Like?

You probably have a lot more questions about menstruation than we can possibly answer in this pamphlet. Of course, some questions are easier to find answers to than others. For instance, if you would like to know more about what actually happens in the body during menstruation, you can look it up in one of the books recommended earlier on page 6. It's harder to find the answer to questions like: ***What's it feel like? How does menstruation affect a girl? Can a girl do everything that she usually does while she's having a period, or will certain things have to change during menstruation?***

In some ways, these questions can't be answered. What's important to remember at the beginning is that girls and women have lots of different experiences with menstruation. What's true for one person may not be true for another. It takes time to get used to having a period and only by experiencing it will you learn what you are comfortable doing—or not doing—during it.

We hope you will give yourself a lot of time to figure this all out! Read lots of different explanations of menstruation and, if you can, talk to lots of people about their experiences so you can get a feel for the ***range*** of possibilities.

Sometimes books and magazine articles and ads can make you think you're supposed to feel a certain way right before or during menstruation. If you don't feel the way the article says most girls or women feel, you may wonder about whether or not your experience is normal. Before you decide that you are too young or too old to be getting a first period—or that your period is too short or too long—or too heavy or too light—or that you feel too happy or too sad during your periods, ***remember—no one description of menstruation applies to everyone.***

We hope that the information in this pamphlet has begun to answer some of your questions about menstruation. And we hope that you'll be able to talk to one or both of your parents about it. While your mom may have more specific information about what it's like to menstruate, don't forget that your father, because of living with her, has had lots of experience with it too—although a different kind of experience.

We wish you success in finding the answers to any questions you have about growing up. And we hope that some of the suggestions we've made and the information we've given are helpful to you.

POSTSCRIPT

I'm interested in your reactions to this pamphlet. Please tell me what you think of it, and whether or not it was helpful.

Write to:

Peggy Stubbs
BODY TALK
Center for Research on Women
Wellesley College
Wellesley, MA 02181

BODY TALK pamphlets may be ordered from the Publications Department, Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA 02181

BT-A Two Pamphlets (For Girls Growing Up and For Parents of Girls)	$ 8.00
BT-B Two Pamphlets (For Boys Growing Up and For Parents of Boys)	$ 8.00
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